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## Utah plan to adopt official gun condemned by anti-firearms groups

Utah is on the verge of becoming the first US state to adopt an official gun in a move that has been condemned by anti-firearms groups. The semi-automatic Browning M1911 pistol, which was a standard issue side arm for the US military from 1911 to 1985, would become an emblem of the state in honour of John Browning, the Utah gun-maker who invented it. The plan has sparked outrage among gun control campaigners who said it was insensitive, coming so soon after a mass shooting in neighbouring Arizona earlier this month. Six people died in the massacre in Tucson, Arizona and US Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was shot in the head. She is now recovering after the attack in which a different type of semi-automatic handgun was used. A spokesman for the Utah Gun Violence Prevention Centre, said: "It's an embarrassment to the state to have a symbol that was used only a few weeks ago to kill innocent people. Semi-automatic pistols are the weapons of choice for those committing massacres." Carl Wimmer, the Republican state politician behind the proposal, said: "There is nothing about the actions of a madman to change the fact that firearms have been used throughout our history to defend American values and traditions." He said the weapon was "an implement of freedom" and Browning should be honoured in his home state for "inventing a firearm that has defended American values and the traditions of this country for 100 years."

Browning's M1911 was used by US forces in both world wars, and in Korea and Vietnam. It is still used by the FBI and is popular with members of the public who legally own firearms.

On Monday Utah celebrated an official "Browning Day" and guns he invented were displayed outside the State Capitol in Salt Lake City.

US states have numerous official symbols, which are selected by the state legislature, to celebrate their cultural heritage.

They include fish, flowers, vegetables, gems and rocks, but none has so far introduced a gun.

Utah already has the Rocky Mountain Elk as its state animal, and coal as its state rock.

Some symbols are well known like Alaska's state animal, the moose, and Idaho's state vegetable, the potato, but there are also more unusual choices.

Arkansas has milk as its official drink, while Washington state has the Pacific Chorus Frog as an official amphibian.

In Montana the duck-billed dinosaur has been made an official fossil, and Maryland named jousting as its official sport.

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